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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CAIRO 003118

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NSC FOR SINGH AND WATERS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV KISL KDEM EG

SUBJECT: MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD: DRAFT PARTY PLATFORM  
HIGHLIGHTS INTERNAL FISSURES

REF: A. CAIRO 144  
1B. CAIRO 1128  
1C. CAIRO 2147  
1D. CAIRO 2148  
1E. CAIRO 2683

Classified By: Minister-Counselor for Economic and Political Affairs  
William R. Stewart, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: The recent release of a markedly conservative draft political party platform has unleashed a wave of criticism against the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (MB), and highlighted internal tensions between the moderate and conservative wings of the Islamist organization. In a highly unusual occurrence for the normally disciplined MB, senior-ranking MB moderates have publicly criticized the draft platform. The MB's Deputy Supreme Guide is reportedly now chairing an internal committee to review the draft, and has indicated that changes are likely. While the latest iteration of the program is a regression to MB rhetoric of years past, the key question is what the final platform will look like. If modifications are made to the charter, it will be indicative of the moderates' power and dominance within the group; conversely, if the final text of the platform remains unchanged, it will clearly demonstrate that the MB's reactionary wing is ascendant. A divided organization operating in a highly uncertain political environment, the MB's drafting of a party platform is part of a larger evolution of the group as it grapples with its political future and identity, and publicly commits, one way or another, to fundamental principles by which Egyptians, and the rest of the world, can better judge its intentions. End summary.

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DRAFT PLATFORM GOES PUBLIC  
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12. (C) Following months of internal deliberations (reftels), in mid-September the MB sent an 108-page draft political party platform to approximately 50 non-MB affiliated Egyptian intellectuals, academics, and political analysts for review and comment. The draft program is the latest in a series that had been previously leaked to the Egyptian press. The drafting of a platform is notable in that it is the most detailed articulation to date of the MB's policy views, eclipsing previous election platforms and "political documents," and in that it represents a tentative step towards the MB's possible formation of a political party. Long criticized for its ambiguous stands on key issues such as religious freedom and women's rights, the process of developing a political charter also appears to be an attempt by the MB to demonstrate its ability to present detailed policy prescriptions, rather than just amorphous slogans such as "Islam is the Solution."

¶3. (C) The draft platform was met by a volley of criticism from many of the "reviewers," as well as from the Egyptian media, government-backed and independent. The document is markedly more conservative than previous iterations of the platform. Criticism of the draft has focused on two issues - (1) the recommended creation of an elected Senior Religious Scholars Group (in Arabic, "Haya'at Kebar Al Ulema"), which both the parliament and the president would have to consult before passing legislation, and which would have the right to veto laws that do not conform with shari'a (Islamic law), and (2) the stipulation specifically barring women and Copts from becoming president. The document also places a heavier emphasis on the centrality of shari'a than previous MB election platforms. While the Egyptian constitution enshrines shari'a as "the main source of legislation," the MB's focus on implementation of shari'a contrasts with, and is contradictory to, its simultaneous emphasis on the civil nature of the Egyptian state. The MB's draft platform also offers a detailed policy prescriptions on a variety of political, economic, and social issues, apparently building on the ideas laid out in the organization's Shura Council elections platform (refs C and D).

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DIVISION IN THE RANKS  
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¶4. (C) A variety of contacts have told us that senior MB moderates are "uncomfortable" with the draft program, and feel that it was ramrodded through the organization at a time when several key moderates were imprisoned (Khayrat Al Shater, the MB's third-most senior official is currently jailed and facing a military tribunal, and Essam El Erian, a

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leading moderate and member of the MB's Political Bureau, was released on October 7 after being imprisoned for almost 3 months) or traveling overseas (leading MB Guidance Council member Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh). In a highly unusual occurrence for the normally disciplined MB ranks, on October 8 an article was posted to the MB's official English-language website, titled, "A Division Within the Muslim Brotherhood?" The piece detailed the disagreements that Aboul Fotouh and Gamal Heshmat (a former leading MB parliamentarian) have with the draft platform, and their criticism of banning women and non-Muslims from the presidency (Heshmat: "This attitude is neither suitable in dealing with reality or our present circumstances, nor is it in agreement with the civil society outlined in the preamble to the Brotherhood's platform.") The two also took issue with the concept of a Senior Religious Scholars Group, with Heshmat "totally rejecting" the establishment of such a committee, and Aboul Fotouh emphasizing that the council would be "consultative" only, whose responsibilities would be to "provide clarifications in response to questions raised by the Supreme Court."

¶5. (SBU) Essam El Erian, upon being released from prison on October 7, asserted that he had not seen the platform before its release. He was quoted in the pan-Arab and Egyptian press as being critical of the platform for denying women and Copts the right to run for president: "It would have been better to keep silent in this respect. Silence, even if some interpret it as ambiguous, is better than floating proposals that run counter to the wishes of society and political elites." El Erian also made a point of noting that the platform was "not intended to merely present the MB's ideas." Rather, it was conceived of to "manage the affairs of society and people."

¶6. (C) Such an open airing of the MB's dirty laundry is atypical, particularly from senior leaders of the organization, who are normally in lock-step publicly. It is also curious that there is so much internal disagreement on the charter, as it presumably had been reviewed and vetted by either the Guidance Council, or at least several high-ranking

MB officials, prior to being released outside of the MB for review. Rumors amid Cairo analysts are that the moderates among the MB's leadership (Aboul Fotouh, Heshmat, and Erian) are now pitted against conservatives such as Mohamed Mursi (head of the MB's Political Bureau, and an official long rumored to have had reservations about the MB's progression towards a political party, as it might dilute the organization's traditional focus on "Da'wa" (proselytizing) and charity activities) and MB secretary-general Mahmoud Ezzat. Aboul Fotouh was allegedly frozen out of the last rounds of the drafting process, and the Guidance Council meeting at which the program was approved for release was reportedly held when he was "conveniently" traveling outside of Egypt.

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NEXT STEPS  
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¶7. (C) Apparently feeling the heat from the barrage of criticism from within and outside the MB, Deputy Supreme Guide Mohamed Habib is reportedly now chairing an MB committee to collect comments from the 50 non-MB "reviewers," and possibly revise the platform before it is finalized. Habib told the London-based pan-Arab newspaper Al Sharq Al Awsat, "What we did so far was prepare a first draft. This will be followed by other formulas, and new amendments that may include additions or omissions (from the original platform). We may even change some issues and points in that platform." In an October 18 statement posted on the MB's website, Habib asserted that there had been a "mistake in the wording" of the paragraph about the Senior Religious Scholars Group that gave the erroneous impression that the opinion of the religious scholars would be binding. He stressed, "The authority of the clerics would be advisory, not binding. We never said that this committee would have any control, domination, or authority. We believe that the People's Assembly is the only body that has the right to legislate and to enact laws." Habib also asserted that, "this committee is not emulating the Iranian model .... We want it to be a technical committee, like those formed in a ministry, and its opinion would be advisory, not binding, such as the Islamic Research Institute's current role." Contacts have told us that the MB's intention in proposing a Senior Religious Scholars Group was to create an independent religious council that was not directly under Al Azhar's authority, as the MB (and many other Egyptians) view Al Azhar, whose top leadership is appointed by the president, as squarely under the government's thumb.

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¶8. (SBU) Habib also emphasized that "the MB's platform will not be a secular program. We have tenets and principles which are based on not separating the state from religion, and a civil state with an Islamic source of authority." In other press reports, Habib is quoted as welcoming the variety of views on the MB's platform, stating, "if we did not want to hear different opinions, we would not have sent the draft platform to almost 50 politicians, thinkers, and researchers.

We sent it to the elites asking them to give us their opinion and remarks. By that, we meant to enrich our ideas and opinions."

¶9. (SBU) Erian reportedly told independent newspaper Al Masry Al Yom that the MB had not yet received feedback from the 50 non-MB "thinkers." He noted that, "once we receive all the replies, the amended version of the platform will be out within two to four weeks." He also asserted that, "definitely there will be some revisions, and all of the criticisms will be taken into consideration." On October 23, Al Masry Al Yom reported that the MB would likely revise the platform to allow for the option of a Coptic or female president. The newspaper quoted an anonymous MB official as stating that the MB was split into two camps over the presidency issue, but that the final version of the platform

will likely note that, "Everyone is entitled to be a presidential candidate, including Copts, and the Egyptian nation has a right to choose the president."

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COMMENT  
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¶10. (C) The MB's internal debate markedly demonstrates the diverse range of opinions contained within the influential organization, with members loosely grouped into either the "moderate" or "conservative" faction. While the latest draft of the program is a disappointing throwback to MB rhetoric of years past, the key question is what the final platform will look like. If changes are made to the charter, it will be indicative of the moderates power and dominance within the organization. Conversely, if the final text of the platform remains unchanged from this latest draft, it will be a clear demonstration that the reactionary wing of the MB is ascendant, and a signal of the intolerance that many Egyptians have long suspected is the true face of the MB.

¶11. (C) A divided organization operating in a highly fluid and uncertain environment (the GOE's campaign of arrests against the MB continues, and the military tribunals of 40 MB members are ongoing), the MB is grappling with not only defining its political agenda, but also the fundamental nature and future of the group. It is unclear precisely what will happen once the party platform is finalized. While Supreme Guide Mahdy Akef and other senior MB officials have made clear the MB will not apply to the ruling-party dominated Political Parties Committee to register a party (due to concerns about the constitutionality of the committee), leading MB moderate Essam El Erian has consistently referred to a future "MB party" in recent statements to the press. It is uncertain where the MB's political evolution will lead. But the process of drafting a platform itself is bringing key issues to the fore, and causing the group to publicly commit, one way or another, to fundamental principles by which Egyptians, and the rest of the world, can better judge its intentions.

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